

Ferries (F.H.) **INDIANA ROOM**

Early Ferries On the Wabash Have Disappeared In Recent Years

By A. R. Markle

Terre Haute was originally a river town, the Wabash being its boundary on the west and the means by which new settlers arrived from the north or south by boat.



A. R. MARKLE.

While the more favored land lay on the east side of the river, there were many in those early days who took up land on the other, less desirable side. The latter group used ferries as their means of crossing the river. These ferries were established at an early day.

The settlement had, no doubt, a ferry before the setting up of Vigo county in 1818, for over a year and a half had passed since the laying out of the town and the sale of lots. There is no record, though, of either Knox county or Sullivan county having granted this privilege. The early records of Sullivan county were destroyed long ago when the Court House was burned.

Our own records of the County Commissioners show no record of a ferry here until on August 11, 1818, the Commissioners set out the following: "On the petition of Salmon Lust and John Durkee for the establishment of a ferry across the Wabash River from the west to the east fraction number twenty one in township number thirteen north of range number nine west, the board being fully satisfied that the notice required by law had been given and that the land on one side is owned by the said applicants; it is ordered that the said ferry be and it is hereby established; that the proprietors thereof procure and keep for the succeeding year one good flat boat sufficient for the transportation of a loaded wagon and four horses; also one skiff or pirogue together with a sufficient number of hands for maning the same and that they be allowed the following rates for ferriage to wit:

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from the first day of May to the first day of December, for a man and horse, twenty five cents, and from the first day of December to the first day of May thirty seven and an half cents; ox teams in the same proportion; for every head of meat cattle six and a fourth cents, for every head of hogs and sheep three and a fourth cents and for every man twelve..." Here the record breaks off abruptly and the page is missing.

From the index, however, we know that similar license was granted on the same day to John Beard and from other sources we know that a ferry was established at or near the present site of Clinton which was then in Vigo county.

First Ferry of Record.

Tuesday, November 11, 1818, a full century before the first Armistice Day, the first ferry of record here was granted to Toussiant Dubois who was to operate from lot number (and the record fails to give the number) in the Town of Terre Haute and the rate was fixed as twenty-five cents for a wagon and horse, fifty cents for a wagon with two horses, one dollar for a wagon and four horses while a man and horse was to pay twelve and a half cents from April first to December first and twenty-five cents from December first to April first. Neat cattle over one year paid six and a quarter cents, hogs and sheep three cents and foot passengers six and a quarter cents in summer and twelve and a half cents in the winter. The higher rates for winter ferriage were due partly to the difficulty of navigation and partly to the lowered amount of traffic and partly, no doubt, to the fact that thrifty folks might wait until the water became ice thick enough to bear a man and occasionally a team and wagon.

On the same day Adam Weaver was granted a license to establish a ferry which later became known as the "lower ferry" but as the number of his lot is not given, the record does not locate it very definitely.

May 11, 1819, the tax on ferries at Terre Haute was fixed as

twelve dollars, the same for Durkee's Ferry and five dollars for those elsewhere in the county.

On May 4, 1825, the full board, then consisting of the justices of each township, met at the house of Israel Harris with Mark Williams, Charles B. Modesitt, Joseph Dickson, John F. Cruft, John Jackson Jr., Robert Graham, Joseph Malcom, Gooding Halloway, William Ray, Nicholas Yeager and Armstrong McCabe present. They called to order and on motion adjourned to the Court House, their first session in the structure which was still unfinished.

At their next session in July, James Farrington applied for and was granted a license to operate a ferry at the mouth of Wabash street, the first ferry to prove a permanent feature of Terre Haute. Farrington's ferry was succeeded by the draw bridge, first at Ohio street and later at Wabash.

Early Vigo Ferry.

Farrington, however, owned the land along the west side of the river from a point opposite Poplar street to one across from Locust and the two bridges of the Draw Bridge Company as well as those of the two railroads had to deal with him before commencing work. Before the construction of the newer bridge at the foot of Wabash, they bought the right of way of him for the grade across the bottoms. In this sale, made as late as 1856, he reserved his ferry rights to himself and his heirs forever.

The Farrington Ferry was the only one to operate a steam boat for the crossing and all in all was probably the most profitable of all of the many ventures in conveying passengers over the Wabash.

Durkee's Ferry afforded a shorter route to Fayette township and the upper parts of the county on the west side of the river. This ferry remained popular until the closing of the north Thirteenth street road which cut off access to it from the city.

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TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

Terre Haute Star Oct. 6, 1957

Ferries (74)
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"Historic Bend In Durkee's Ferry Road"

BY Dorothe J. Clark

The Durkee and Barbour families, prominent settlers of Fayette township, came here together in 1817 and settled near New Goshen. The heads of these families were Daniel Barbour and Dr. John Durkee. Both came from Olean, Jefferson County, New York, and arrived at what is now Terre Haute in November 1817.

While the family waited on the Ohio River, the two men went to Vincennes on horseback. At Vincennes they were directed to come to Fort Harrison. Land here was then ten to fifteen dollars an acre. But instead of locating at Fort Harrison, they brought land in what is now Fayette township, on the other side of the river. The families remained in Fort Harrison, while the log cabins were being built.

A word of explanation is in order about the meaning of this township. Paris township was formed May 1820, by the county commissioners. It took in all that part of Vigo County north of the line dividing township 12 and 13 and west of the Wabash River. The name was changed to Fayette in February 1824. Thus the name of that part of the county known as Fayette was first Independence township, then Paris township, and now Fayette township.

First Physician

Dr. John Durkee built a cabin on the northwest quarter of Section 18 in January, 1818. He was the first physician to locate in Fayette township. After him came Dr. Hubbard. They had so few patients, however, that Dr. Durkee turned his attention to farming and Dr. Hubbard to chair making.

With so many settlers coming into this part of the country, a need was soon felt for a way to get across the Wabash River to take corn and wheat to be ground into meal and flour at the nearest mill, which was Markle's Mill on Otter Creek. Realizing this need, Dr. John Durkee built a ferry at the spot now known as Tecumseh. The Durkee's Ferry was established in August 1818, the first ferry on the Wabash to be licensed. This franchise was granted to Salmon Lusk and John Durkee. The first ferryman was Col. Baldwin, who afterward became prominent in Edgar County ILL.

Fares Are Set

According to the permit, Durkee was to maintain a large flat boat of sufficient size to hold a wagon with a team of four horses, a "piroque in which to ferry over foot passengers and sufficient men to operate both boats. Then the fare which he might charge was set. For a man and a team in summer time the price was 25 cents; in winter it was 37½ cents. A horse or a man was 12½ cents, while cattle and sheep were one half that price. In the next two years a number of other ferries were licensed, several at the foot of the town, and their rates were much higher. A wagon with a four

horse team cost one dollar in winter.

It is probable that John Durkee grew dissatisfied and made remarks about discrimination for in 1823 his charge for a wagon and team was raised to fifty cents, though he was never permitted to charge "city prices".

Now, Durkee's Road leading down to the ferry is still very plainly marked and easily found, but the road on this side of the Wabash River from the ferry on to Markle's Mill is not so easily found. According to the County Surveyor's Office, County Road 56 W. runs through Section 18 from New Goshen through the north half of Sections 20 and 24 to Tecumseh.

To find the road on this side of the river you go up to the end of the North Thirteenth street pavement, and after getting permission from the owner, you may continue one-quarter of a mile north on a private road and find the historic bend in ~~an otherwise straight~~ the road. Beyond this it goes on down to the river and is just south of the mouth of Otter Creek. The reason for this sharp bend in the otherwise straight road is a very interesting one.

Colorful Character

One of the most colorful characters in our local history was Drummer Davis. He had deserted from the British army at Detroit to join Harrison's army. He was the drummer at the Battle of Fort Harrison, and it was said that with Zach Taylor to do the fighting and Davis to do the drumming they could fight the whole creation."

After the War of 1812 was over, Drummer Davis made his home with his son-in-law Stewart in Fayette township. He spent his declining years in entertaining anyone who would listen about his war experiences and especially about the Indian attacks on Fort Harrison.

Terre Haute was often disturbed by street fighting in those early days. On election days and muster days whiskey was taken freeley and then came fighting. Most of these fights would occur near Drummer Davis, who would be rattling away at his drum, regardless of the disturbance around him. This Davis was a very short-legged, long-bodied man, red-faced, big-nosed, little man, If you can imagine such a being. He had a loud voice, was awfully profane, and while beating his drum he would throw one of his sticks in the air, toss off a glass of whisky, catch the stick in its descent, and never lose a note, some of the boys said.

Hears of Surveying

One day Drummer Davis heard that the county Surveyors were to survey the Durkee's Road on the eastern side of the river. He had his son-in-law row him across the river, and carrying his long black rifle, he marched off to the spot where he had buried his comrades who had been killed in the battle at Fort Harrison.

This was approximately two miles from the Fort.

Upon reaching the spot where they were buried on a little knoll, he seated himself with his rifle across his knees, and waited for the surveyors to reach him. Seeing that the road would run across the spot where he was sitting, they stopped and asked him what was the trouble.

Davis replied that his comrades were buried there, and as long as he lived, there would not be a road across their burial ground. He implied that someone else might be killed in his efforts to prevent such desecration. Whether out of respect for the dead or the living, the surveyors routed the new road around this hallowed ground and continued on with the road. As years went by, the reason for this bend was lost in history, and many people have wondered why the road curved with no apparent reason. This spot is now the home of Mr. Robert Curvey, and he was very much interested in knowing that the occupied such an historic location. Since his hobby is collecting antique guns, he can appreciate history in all its forms.

Ferris (T.H.)

DARWIN: The Origin Of Crossings

Vigo County Public Library Community Affairs File

By LINDA K. INMAN

THE Darwin Ferry, a means of transportation used by traders and settlers as early as 1818, still is carrying people and goods across the Wabash River between Indiana and Illinois.

Maintaining the 150-year-old transport is the Darwin Ferry Association, made up of several families who farm on both sides of the river. The ferry saves them a drive of 25 miles upstream to Terre Haute, or 20 miles downstream to Hutsonville., Ill.

In addition to farm traffic, tourists often pay the \$1 to experience the unusual method of travel.

Clarence Lathrop, called the ferry man, has operated the boat for the last 16 years. His two brothers and a great-uncle operated it before him.

"I would guess," he says, "that the Lathrops have operated this ferry more than any other family."

A gasoline engine in a small boat at the ferry's side provides the power. Two large wheels on the ferry control the landing planks. A smaller wheel adjusts the ferry for river currents. A cable guides the ferry across.

LATHROP is licensed by the Coast Guard to operate the ferry and must take a test every five years to maintain his qualification.

When weather is rainy, the gravel roads leading to the ferry are often impassable. To reach the boat, travelers on the Indiana side must exit off Ind. 63 south of Terre Haute at the ferry sign. On the Illinois side, the route to the ferry is off Route 1 five miles south of Marshall.

On a warm day when the ferry isn't very busy, a traveler may find Lathrop waiting for business at picnic tables which are on both sides of the stream. The Indiana side is mainly corn and bean fields. On the Illinois side is Darwin, a town of about 350.

At one time there was a steamboat landing at Darwin and the town was a shipping point for communities up to 60 miles away.

The ferry operates from 6 a.m. to dark unless rains cut off the

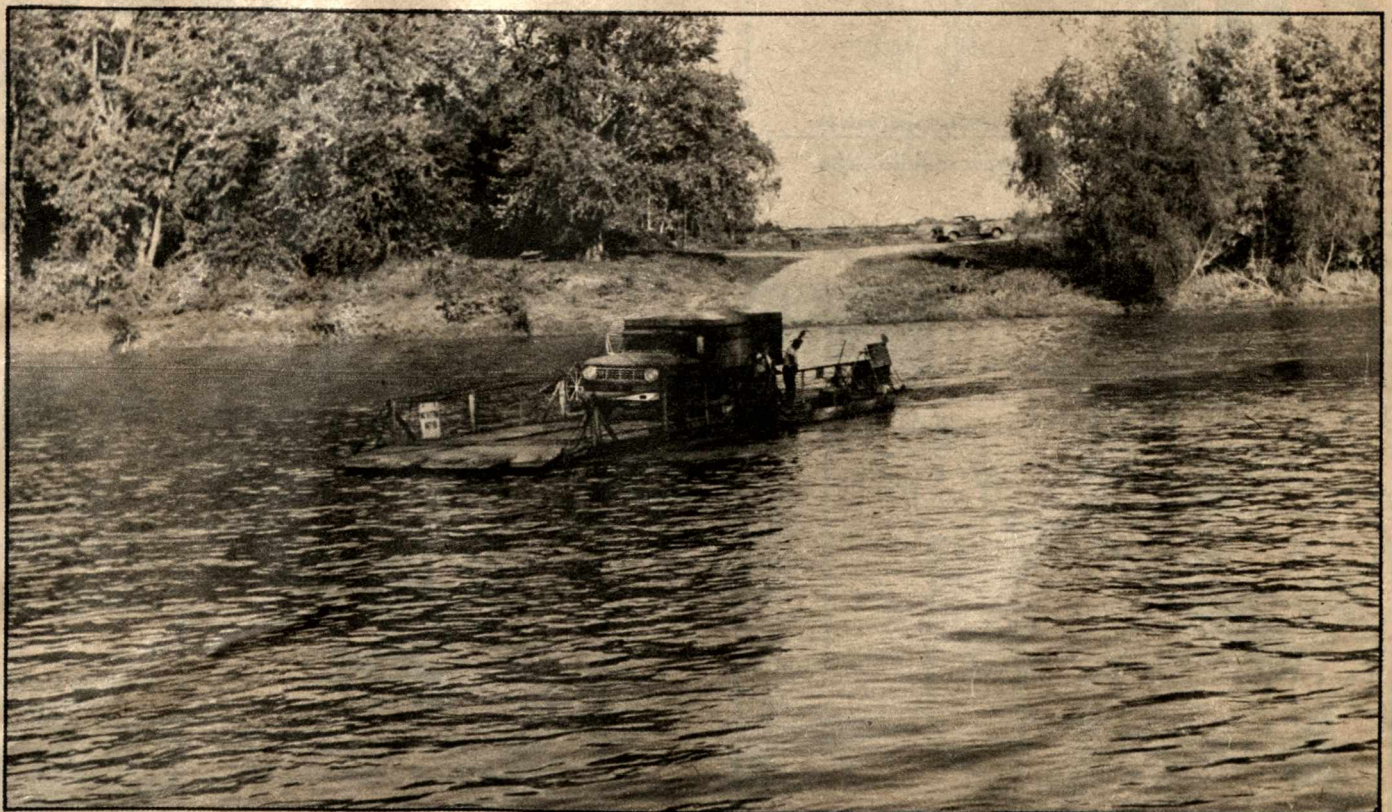
Community Affairs File

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A truck is on the ferry and ready to start across (above) At midstream (below) the ferry angles against the current. The river is about 500 feet wide and 20 feet deep at this spot.



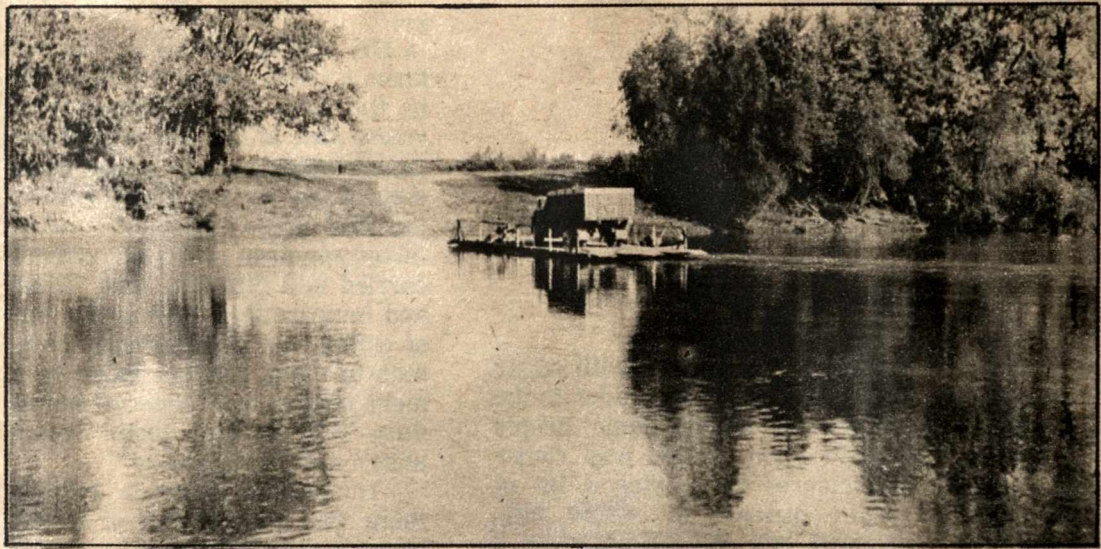
roads or ice closes the river.

"The busiest time," says Lathrop, "is usually in the spring

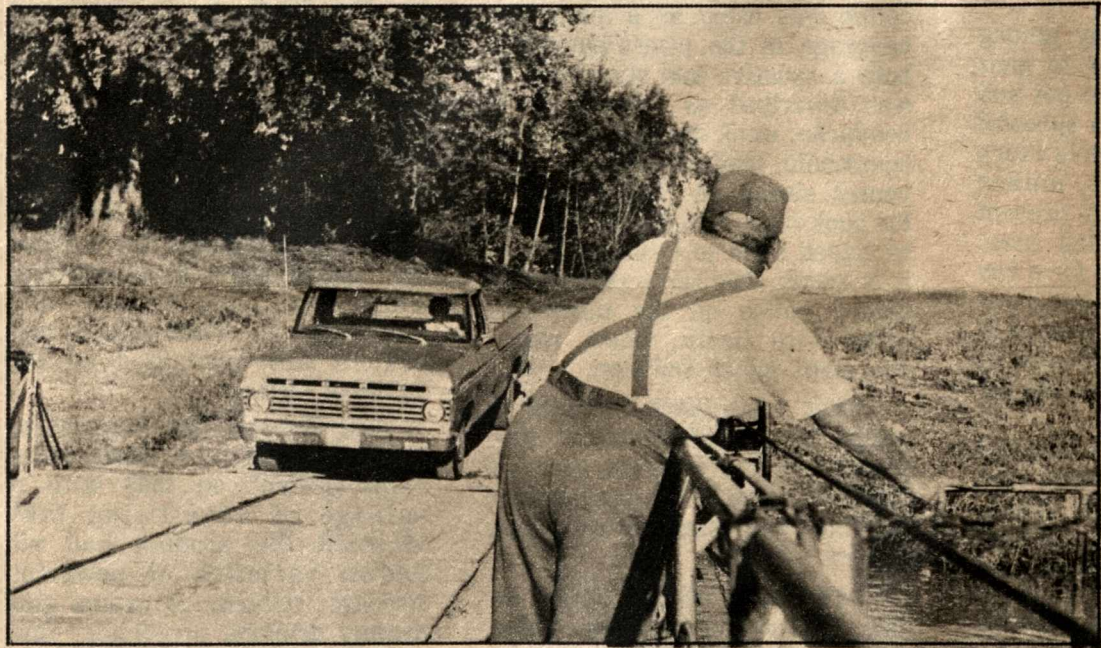
when the farmers are working the fields. There seems to be a lot of tourists then, too. Of course, there

are always tourists coming to see the ferry."

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An estimated 400,000 bushels of grain cross like this each year.



Clarence Lathrop, operator of the ferry, steers into place for a truck to come aboard (above) and chats with the occupants (below).

